

*Social Media, Traditional Media, The Public, And The U.S. President: Evolution Through*

*The Barack Obama And Donald Trump Presidencies*

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

While the relationship between the press, the public, and the U.S. president has been ever-evolving over the course of the country's history, significant changes in technology in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (particularly in terms of the introduction of social media) have changed the dynamics of the relationship altogether. This has brought about a new political reality, one where presidents can use social media to bypass traditional media completely and focus on their relationships with the public and other political figures. Analysis of the evolution of the press-presidency-public relationship, along with an examination of the nature of social media in the greater political context, gives an idea of the power the president in particular can have by way of social media. Further analyses of the way recent presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have used certain social media platforms aim to shed light on ways in which future presidents could use and take advantage of this technology.

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Finally, my thanks to the myriad friends and family who cheered me on and encouraged me to see through this process to the end.

### **Process Analysis Statement**

The road that took this thesis from a mere idea to a completed research paper was a long and winding one, and while the final product is not necessarily the sort I'd envisioned at the start of this process, I still find I have learned much from the experience, and I firmly believe that this project encompasses much of what I have learned in the academic fields of journalism and political science during my time at Ball State.

The basic idea for the thesis came about during my junior year, as I studied Media and Politics under the guidance of Dr. Brandon Waite. I found myself quite fascinated by the topic at the time, and given my major in journalism and telecommunications and my minor in political science, I felt that a thesis within that realm would encompass much of what I have learned in my time at Ball State.

Some particular fascination came with the role the U.S. president plays within this relationship, given the power he is often perceived as having in many facets of politics and American life as a whole. My final project for my Media and Politics class, indeed, ended up focusing on that relationship, and even before I sought out an advisor for this project, I knew I wanted to expand on some key aspect of that relationship for my thesis.

It was after Dr. Natalee Seely agreed to advise my project that it began to well and truly take shape. From there, the challenge became what aspect of the press-presidency relationship to focus on; as Dr. Seely was quick to point out to me, even that specific subset of the media-politics relationship is still far too vast for a thesis of this scope and length. It was in reading articles about the general relationship between the press and the presidency (and taking notes on those articles) that I was able to start homing in on an idea. Given the aforementioned vastness of this field of research, deciding on a specific topic proved to be a complicated, multi-week

process, one that forced me to consider what exactly I wanted my potential audience to get out of my research, as well as what particular subfields within this field of research were . While I thought long and hard over potential topics, the last topic I came up with (just prior to a meeting with Dr. Seely) was the one that ultimately stuck: how has technology (social media in particular) affected the relationship between the two, and what ramifications are brought about by that change? From this experience, I learned that I can learn much from pursuing a line of thinking to its logical conclusion, taking what might be considered a weakness of mine (overthinking) and turning it into an asset.

One additional challenge came in deciding how to go about organizing this research, particularly where outlining the evolution of technology and presidential uses of it was concerned. In such a vast topic, how does one decide where to start, and within those boundaries, how exactly does one discuss the chosen topics? Context is key, and it is vastly important, for that reason, to ensure the results of this research are viewed within their proper context. Eventually, we decided to focus on two key presidents who made significant strides in bringing social media into politics in one way or another (namely, Barack Obama and Donald Trump), and it was in this context that my thesis truly began to come together.

As my research progressed, the various lessons and findings of the myriad articles I read (whether because Dr. Seely sent them as helpful guidance or because I sought out additional insight on some aspect of my research) began to come together like a sort of academic jigsaw puzzle. My goal, then, was not only ascertaining where these various lessons fit within the greater context of my writing (which began late in fall 2019 as I continued my research), but also figuring out *how* these findings linked together with one another. In some senses, this has changed the way I think about my work; everything we learn, in one way or other, is connected

to something else that we've learned, and it is in making those connections that we become able to make greater sense of the world around us, that we become able to take away key insights from our learning. I have kept this in mind throughout the writing of this thesis, and I hope to be able to take these lessons forward with me into my journalism career.

This thesis is simultaneously a reflection and a roadmap; it aims to give a sense of the point we are at in terms of the press-public-presidency relationship, how and why we got there (particularly in terms of social media's influence), how recent presidents have used social media to further shape this relationship, and where we *could* be headed in the future. While I cannot say for sure what direction this relationship will take, we must be willing to consider the future now, and we must be able to understand the past in order to make sense of the future. My hope, on the whole, is that this thesis inspires critical thought about where we fit into this relationship, and how we can be prepared for any change that may come, especially in such an uncertain time in our country and our world's history.

## Introduction

At the start of this century, it seemed that the U.S. president's power to communicate with the public was dwindling, thanks both to changes in technology and changes in the habits of the public and press. At the time, presidential strategies for communication revolved around reaching broad swaths of the public through broadcast television speeches (which, in turn, depended on the major networks allowing him access to their airwaves); however, the development and growth of cable television in the 1980s and 1990s gave audiences a significant number of alternatives to presidential speeches, which in turn meant those audiences were not captive to the president's speeches as they had been in the 1960s and 1970s (Baum & Kernell, 2006). This, in turn, led to the networks becoming less willing to give up increasingly valuable airtime to the president, to the point where requests from the president for airtime could sometimes be rejected outright. For example, networks rejected a request from then-president Barack Obama in 2014 to give a primetime speech about immigration, in part because of the threat airing such a speech would have posed to their ratings (Fuller, 2014). In an age where audiences continued to rely to a major extent on television, such instances as this posed a "serious strategic dilemma" in terms of the president's ability to promote policy and the like to the public (Baum & Kernell, 2006).

A recent technological development, social media, has become something of a solution to this problem, allowing the president to connect and communicate with the people and various other political figures and organizations in ways that previously were not possible. Where once the president would have to face gatekeepers in the form of the media (i.e. newspapers, broadcasters, and other news outlets), and even in an era where the president's ability to reach the public through established forms of media has been diminishing significantly, social media

has given the president an unfiltered platform with which to disseminate his views and thoughts on a variety of matters, particularly those of a political bent. Such a platform allows the president to significantly influence not only the public's views, but also administrative agendas, thus shaping government policy and the ways in which such policy is carried out (Laguarda, 2019).

The most recent U.S. presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, have gone about using this new platform in very different ways. President Barack Obama, according to Baum (2010), used social media as part of a “a complex and multi-tiered communication strategy” to reach an audience similar in size to the audiences previous presidents had access to through broadcast television. In addition, Obama was able to use technology and social media to identify and reach niche audiences he wanted to target messages toward (Milligan, 2015). Meanwhile, incumbent President Donald Trump aims to use social media (Twitter in particular) not only to reach his core base of followers and influence policy, but also to delegitimize the media that once gave presidents a major platform. His tweets on a variety of topics have had significant success in terms of engaging social media users (Anderson, 2017). However, this has not necessarily translated to success in terms of followers; as of January 22, 2020, Trump had over 71.3 million followers while Obama had over 112.2 million followers, making his account the most followed on all of Twitter. Even so, authors such as Laguarda (2019) argue “[Trump's] conduct represents the apotheosis of Twitter as political speech.”

This thesis serves to answer several key questions. First, how has presidential communication with the people of the United States evolved over time, and where does the press fit in within that history? Second, how has social media altered the nature and course of presidential communication, particularly in recent years? How have recent presidents used social media? By extension, where do the media and the people fit in within this new iteration of

presidential communication? What ramifications does this emerging mode of communication have for future presidents?

## **Literature Review**

### *History of Presidential Communication*

Presidential communication with the public and the news media has evolved significantly over the course of American history, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries. Technology, from radio to television to the Internet to social media, has played a major role in facilitating this change.

Going as far back as the mid-19th century, presidents have been engaged in a “long tradition of presidents employing the latest communications technologies to speak to Americans directly rather than through the Washington press corps” (DeSilver, 2015). Calvin Coolidge, for example, became the first president to speak to Americans over the radio, though the first president to be seen as a master of the radio would not come until a decade later in the form of Franklin Roosevelt, who fully embraced the technology by having broadcasting equipment permanently set up in the White House (DeSilver, 2015). It was through his Fireside Chats that Roosevelt used the medium to “speak directly to the American people” (DeSilver, 2015). Indeed, the Fireside Chats came to be a source of comfort for numerous Americans during both the latter days of the Great Depression and, later on, World War II, thus “[forging] a bond with the electorate through radio” (Biser, 2016). In World War II in particular, the “chats” became Roosevelt’s way of frequently keeping the public updated on the progress of the war (Biser, 2016). He was able to use the “chats” to, when needed, “quiet rumors and strengthen morale,” thus aiming to build American confidence around the war effort (Yu, 2005, p. 92). The response from the public when it came to the Fireside Chats, at least in terms of letters and packages sent



to the White House, was significant, with Americans writing in to respond to Roosevelt's addresses in "vast proportions" (Biser, 2016). Later on, Dwight D. Eisenhower used the up-and-coming medium of television to his advantage; his campaign created some of the first television campaign ads, and during his presidency, he held the first Presidential press conference to be covered on television (DeSilver, 2015). Since then, presidents have continued to do much the same with new technologies. The first White House website, for example, came in 1994 during Bill Clinton's presidency, allowing visitors to read transcripts of recent speeches given by the president and vice president, along with information on presidential policies and initiatives. The site also gave visitors the opportunity to send e-mails to the president and vice president, an early version of the interactivity that would become more common for presidents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Barack Obama, indeed, achieved notoriety through his use of social media.

This said, the history of presidential communication also depends on the history of the news media. The evolution of technology has also resulted in shifts over time with regard to who in the realm of politics gets the most attention. Presidents prior to the 1920s generally did not dominate the news and, by extension, the public space, because in an era where people got their news from print sources such as newspapers and magazines, such sources tended to focus much more on Congress and the Supreme Court than modern-day equivalents might (Nelson, 2000). This is not to say that presidents did not receive *any* attention; rather, they were on much more equal footing with the other branches of federal government when it came to press coverage (Nelson, 2000).

The development of broadcast media and news sources, starting with the radio, brought a dramatic shift to this pattern (and American political life as a whole) (Nelson, 2000). Presidents became a far more significant figure, in essence, because the other branches of government were

seen as not being conducive to broadcast coverage. This change had mainly to do with the nature in which the other government branches go about their business. Congress “speaks with many voices, and ... does so in ways that radio did not like: cacophonously, and according to no script,” while the Supreme Court “does not speak at all, at least not for the broadcast media” (Nelson, 2000, p. 256).

The trend in news coverage that started with radio continued throughout the rest of the 20th century. For example, a comparative analysis of evening television news programs from the early 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, respectively, found that the executive branch continued to receive the majority of news coverage, and as the years went on, that focus was increasingly on the president himself, rather than any other part of the executive branch (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2006). Meanwhile, across all three time periods, all 535 members of Congress combined received less coverage than the president, and even that smaller proportion of coverage decreased as the years went on. The judicial branch, owing in part to its ban on cameras and a lack of “transformational decisions” across the time periods analyzed, barely received any coverage at all (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2006).

### *Modeling Mass Media Methods*

The traditional dynamics of the mass media that tended to underscore presidential communication (and still do today, to a much lesser extent) are often illustrated using the source-message-channel-receiver model (also known as the SMCR model), which provided the underpinning American media institutions and political campaigns relied on for many years (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). In brief, in the model, “a message originates with a source, is transmitted through a given channel, and is translated and distributed via a receiver,” with those getting the message receiving very little opportunity to provide feedback (Metzgar & Maruggi,

2009, p. 144). There is some variance in every aspect of the model, depending on who or what the source is, what their message is, how they go about communicating it (whether by way of television, radio, or even an in-person speech), and who the receiver is (as well as whether or not they are the intended target of the message) (“SMCR Model,” n.d.). Attitudes, whether toward the audience, the subject matter of the communication, or any other pertinent factor (depending on the situation) also tend to factor into the communication, as will the sociocultural context, whether of the source or the receiver (Oyero, 2010, p. 19). The model, in essence, ends up “stressing the role of the relationship between the source and the receiver as an important variable in the communication process” (Oyero, 2010, p. 19). Ultimately, it ends up being the job of the receiver to decode messages and decide what to do with the information they have been given.

Of course, within the context of the model, depending on the medium in question, the communication from source to receiver can be complicated by a variety of issues; the intended message could, indeed, be lost entirely in the process. For example, the success of conveying a message depends, in part, on the communication skills of the source in question, and even when the source is a skilled communicator, it can be difficult to “encode the full intent of what they want to say,” thus leading to some loss of the intended message (“SMCR Model,” n.d.). In times when mass media serve as gatekeepers (i.e. the “channel”) for the message, they often “translate” what the original source has said; this also adds noise to the process, and in major cases, it can lead to “serious distortion” (“SMCR Model,” n.d.). These imperfections can still factor in even in the modern technological era, meaning sources must take some degree of caution in how they go about communicating their message, whatever it may be.

*Changes in media and their ramifications for the President*

Even in the years before social media became a prominent part of presidential communication strategies, significant changes were happening both in the media and in the president's approach to interacting with the public. As noted earlier, the evolution and growth of cable television had significant ramifications that negatively affected the president's ability to not only hold the attention of the public, but also get access to time on the air from the major broadcast networks (Baum & Kernell, 2006). On the whole, the expansion of cable television and the Internet, while giving presidents multiple new venues through which to spread their messages, essentially serves to siphon off their audience and section them into numerous smaller subsets – that is, new media finds its success in “[trying] to provide a product that more closely fits the preferences of a particular subset of the people” (Baum, 2010, p. 10). In the case of politics, these forms of media tend to separate by way of political ideology; cable news networks, for example, aim at three different audiences, with Fox News, CNN and MSNBC being oriented toward conservatives, moderates and liberals, respectively (Baum, 2010, p. 10). Meanwhile, by the late 2000s, the internet's respective realm of politics had also become one where many self-selected into sources that suited their ideology; in short, though many internet news sources can and do serve as audience aggregators, “the political blogosphere functions primarily as an arena for partisan and ideological self-selection,” one where outlets often tended towards news that favored one particular political party over another (Baum, 2010, p. 11). Baum (2010) notes that the result of this evolving media landscape where new media were becoming increasingly central in the realm of American politics was that “presidents, and politicians in general, [needed] to work much harder to communicate with the American people, and to be far more precise in tailoring their messages to particular sub-constituencies who might otherwise tune them out entirely” (p. 4). He further refers to two key strategies leaders utilize in appealing

to audiences: “preaching to the choir” (i.e. reaching out to one’s political base to motivate voters and get them to support the leader in question on key policy issues) and “converting the flock” (i.e. reaching out beyond the political base to gain more supporters and expand the leader’s coalition of support). At the time, traditional news outlets had “lost much of their utility to presidents as vehicles for converting the flock” (Baum, 2010, p. 10). In that sense, soft news programs, along with entertainment talk shows, represented “one of the last, and perhaps the best opportunity for political leaders to convert the flock,” even in an environment where developments such as cable and online news allowed voters to self-select into an outlet that suits their particular ideologies (Baum, 2010, p. 19). Meanwhile, with regard to “preaching to the choir,” those aforementioned new media, given their partisan patterns, proved to be ideal vehicles for reaching out to core bases (Baum 2010). Social media, ultimately, would continue this trend.

### *Social media*

Social media, from the late 2000s onward, has drastically altered the dynamic between the media, the public, and the president (perhaps even more so than technologies such as cable television and the Internet in decades prior). In its purest form, the term “social media” refers to “highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content” (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011, p. 1). Commonly used social media tools include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube; within this paper, we will be focusing on Facebook and especially Twitter, with particular regard for the way these services are used in a political and presidential communication context.

Facebook (launched in February 2004), as of January 2020, describes itself as allowing users to “connect with friends, family and communities of people who share ... interests.” Features within the service, such as Groups and Pages, give users the opportunity to further expand who they interact with. Key parts of the main service include Timeline, which provides each user with a space where they can post content while friends have the ability to post messages, Status, which allows users to alert audiences (be those global audiences or specific groups of friends on the website) to their whereabouts or circumstances, and News Feed, which shows users changes in the statuses and information of friends, groups, and pages they connect with (Hall, 2019).

Twitter, meanwhile, is described as a “microblogging service,” allowing users to send out short messages to varied groups of recipients (“Twitter,” 2019). When users Tweet, while their Tweets (as the individual messages are known) are usually visible to anyone using the service, a user’s Tweets are usually relayed to those who choose to receive Tweets from that user (known as “following”) (“Twitter,” 2019). There are few limits on what users can tweet about, though the service limits the length of the messages users send out; for much of its existence, the limit was 140 characters, but currently, it stands at 280 characters, though users are also allowed to include multimedia content such as images, videos and links with their Tweets. Users also have the ability to reply to each other’s Tweets, providing the possibility to create dialogue on a variety of different topics.

At a worldwide level, many within the population use these social media services; Facebook noted in an October 2019 financial results report that around 1.62 billion people were considered daily active users, and that number has continued to increase from year to year. Meanwhile, Twitter, in its own financial report in the same month, announced it had reached 145

million daily active users worldwide. While not as wide a reach as Facebook, Twitter, much like Facebook, retains significant influence in the social media sphere.

*Social media and traditional news organizations*

Social media, on the whole, has had significant implications for how news organizations rooted in traditional media gather and report the news. While the transition from print to online news websites had a certain level of influence on readership habits, social networking's impact on the news industry has been even more vast, particularly because of changes in terms of visual design, along with the nature of "the technical possibilities granted to audiences that can access, share, and recommend the content to large communities of users" (Bastos, 2015, p. 316). One contributor to change in terms of readership was the ways in which social media tools emphasize significantly different types of content from one another; a comparison between Facebook and Twitter, for example, found that while Facebook emphasized pieces in the realms of arts and opinion, Twitter presented more content related to national news, the economy, and technology (Bastos, 2015). Indeed, on the whole, Twitter's news content was found to be much more oriented toward hard news stories (such as politics) (Bastos, 2015). The challenge for news organizations, then, has been adapting to the varying nature of not only what different social media services emphasize, but also what sort of content the users of these different services prefer. Where the organizations have some level of control on their respective news websites, these organizations are beholden even more so to external factors in the age of social media. News organizations may aim to deliver content deemed to be of public interest, but all the same, they also have to take care to balance that with what is of interest to "increasingly interactive and demanding readers" (Bastos, 2015, p. 316).

The solidified link between news organizations and their readers has also helped facilitate the rise of “citizen journalism” in newsrooms, giving the audience even more of an active role in the newsgathering process. This said, the evidence suggests that the content submitted by the audience and social media participants goes mostly unseen unless the mainstream media chooses to amplify it (Usher, 2017). Though citizens have more methods to engage with and/or produce content, the existence of these pathways does not inherently guarantee their usage, or that those who do use those pathways will be powerful or successful (Usher, 2017). On the whole, news producers seem to continue to resist audience participation, whether because they view these participants as mere sources rather than creators of news or because of the way in which these producers perceive authority (Usher, 2017). Citizens, by all indications, have *not* become key actors in news organizations, even in the modern technological age (Usher, 2017). Social media, then, while capable of giving voices to those who might not have a voice otherwise, is still heavily oriented toward established news organizations, and in a sense, citizen journalism’s rise gives them that much more power in terms of gatekeeping and the overall newsmaking process.

#### *Opinion leaders and social media*

Many people both in and outside of politics have achieved some level of notability within the social media realm, and this notability allows them to influence what news and events people pay attention to. Along these lines, Bergstrom & Belfrage (2018) define an opinion leader as “one or more persons particularly active in ... social media flows, who update often, post news and links to the original source, and also often comment on the shared news.” In group interviews with young social media users, interviewees reflected on the role and impact of opinion leaders in terms of how individuals use social media. In general, opinion leaders paying attention (and, in turn, drawing attention) to news items that people feel they might have missed



otherwise gives those leaders a level of significance, and it was found that those opinion leaders were also seen as playing an important role in the interpretation of news (Bergstrom & Belfrage, 2018, p. 591). The interviewees also tended to be “highly aware of the opinion leaders’ role as vehicles and mediators of salient content” (Bergstrom & Belfrage, 2018, p. 592). For the interviewees, to some extent, keeping updated on news meant following more than just traditional news distributors; in this regard, the subjects in question in the study seemed to know “the importance of being critical of sources” (Bergstrom & Belfrage, 2018, p. 592). In essence, social media leaves open the possibility for more than just journalists to contribute to news distribution and the framing of stories. This represents a significant change from the SMCR model, in the sense that social media users can respond back to stories, filter them out, and decide in real time, based to some extent on the opinions of others, what stories and topics merit discussion. Indeed, more recent models of communication note the flow of communication on the Internet in particular becomes three-dimensional rather than the linear form it takes in models such as the SMCR model (Oyero, 2010, p. 24). In essence, the Internet facilitates one-to-many, one-to-one, and many-to-one communication; however, it also allows for the emergence of a fourth form of communication, many-to-many, since information on the Internet is both entered from many different sources and selected by many individuals depending on their respective requirements, wants, and needs (Oyero, 2010, p. 24). Social media, then, fits within the one-to-many, many-to-one, and many-to-many flows of communication. Within the context of the one-to-many aspect of the model, a tweet made by a single person can potentially reach a large audience of social media users. In the many-to-one context, then, a Twitter timeline made up of tweets from tens, hundreds or thousands of other Twitter users, for example, is cultivated for each individual Twitter user depending on what they wish to see. Insofar as this happens on a

much broader scale, social media, in allowing for this large-scale individual cultivation of communication, creates a many-to-many communication environment. On the whole, social media users have the capacity to serve as both the source and receiver; the challenge, then, comes in attracting attention to whatever a user may decide to post (Iyer & Katona, 2015).

This can be particularly seen in matters of civic action on social media. Those using social media to affect change in government have met with some success in general over time, though the nature of social media makes it more difficult for some citizens to get attention in such matters than others. In a study of the way social media users diffused political information revolving around Wisconsin's 2012 recall election, for example, users with greater levels of social network connectivity and political involvement met with more success in influencing the flow of information within Twitter networks than those who were less involved and/or connected (Xu, Sang, Blasiola, & Park, 2014). Location also served as a significant factor in determining online influence, with users perceived as "local" in a given matter being more likely to be retweeted (Xu et al., 2014). While, in theory, any person can speak out in a given social media conversation, numerous factors determine how likely it is that someone's message will be heard, let alone spread to other users.

#### *Political leaders and social media*

The usage of social media websites by political figures in particular is hardly a new phenomenon. In 2009, just a few years after Twitter came into existence, an analysis of thousands of Twitter posts by U.S. congresspeople found that 159 of them were using the service at the time (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2009). More and more government officials have started to use social media in the years since then; by the latter half of 2011, 451 U.S.

congresspeople had Twitter accounts, while 487 were registered with Facebook (Glassman, Straus, & Shogan, 2013).

As the mere participation of government officials on social media has evolved, so, too, has the nature in which they use these services. The 2009 study on Twitter usage found that while congresspeople on Twitter used the service in a variety of different ways, they were generally using the service to share information similar to what they and their offices would share in preexisting forms of media (Golbeck et al., 2009). By 2011, while congresspeople were still taking a variety of approaches while using Facebook and Twitter, they generally tended toward making posts meant to take positions on issues, with a lesser emphasis on visits, trips or events taking place in their home district or state (Glassman et al., 2013).

Much as the potential for citizen interaction created by social media ends up being limited in the realm of news, the way in which Congresspeople go about using social media also severely mitigates this possibility. While the scale and extent to which government officials have started using social media creates some level of transparency, research by Hemphill, Otterbacher & Shapiro (2013) finds that only a small portion of tweets by Congresspeople actively solicited action or engagement; in essence, they use it as a broadcasting tool, one reliant in many senses on the SMCR model, rather than one for engagement. In this sense, the office holders tend to hold much of the power in the source-receiver relationship.

#### *Social media and its impact on politics*

Social media creates many possibilities for those both inside and outside of politics. This said, social media is not the be-all end-all of political communication. In analysis of the role of social media in the 2008 election, it was found that it had the ability to facilitate dialogue and public discussion, but these venues did little to influence discussion, participation, or election

outcomes; in essence, social media tools “are no replacement for message, motivation, or strategy” (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009, p. 141). In essence, the effects of social media depend not on the mediums themselves, but on the manner in which the public and political figures alike use it.

Indeed, the idea that social media can be ineffective due to such effects as “slacktivism” has been, in turn, one critique of the idea that social media can impact national politics (Shirky, 2011). This failure, however, reflects far more on the motivation of the people who use social media than it does social media itself, and in many senses, social media can serve as a way to coordinate action in the real world, rather than a replacement for it (Shirky, 2011).

One such example comes in the effect social media had in the Arab Spring; not only did it play a central role in facilitating and shaping political debates, it also allowed those using these services to put pressure on their respective governments (Howard et al., 2011). Further, while it must be pointed out that correlation does not equate to causation, spikes in online conversations revolving around these political matters were often followed by major events such as mass protests, becoming a sort of culmination to the action already being taken online (Howard et al., 2011). Such action, in a world brought together in many ways by social media, also helped the ideas and matters being discussed online to cross international borders, and in some cases, key figures in the Arab Spring amassed followers from other countries who would eventually follow suit with similar democratic protests (Howard et al., 2011). In essence, while social media did play some role in the success of the Arab Spring, ultimately, such success depended on taking action outside the realm of social media.

Metzgar and Maruggi (2009) bring up the possibility social media brings to the table at a political level, noting that “A person with a very small piece of information, one that can be

communicated in 140 characters (Twitter's message limit [at the time]), can potentially capture a nation," with that information going "from idea, to digital post, to a national audience with very few gatekeepers or powerbrokers weighing in on that information" (p. 151).

In more recent times, Twitter has had a significant direct impact on politics, allowing campaigns and office holders to directly connect with voters, giving those in politics a chance to tailor their message much more precisely than traditional media allows for, and bypassing a variety of gatekeepers (Laguarda, 2019). Indeed, new media in general has allowed for this possibility, "[allowing] for leaders to first identify and then communicate more directly with their core constituents," which in turn makes "preaching to the choir" more of a viable strategy than ever (Baum, 2010, p. 24).

Both Barack Obama and Donald Trump have capitalized on this possibility in their own ways during their respective presidencies. Where Obama's reputation as a social media president receded into the background as his presidency continued (though he continued to use new media in reaching his base), Trump's usage of Twitter to reach out to his political base has remained quite similar even after his ascent to the presidency, even as he faced criticism over the way in which he used it. How, then, have these differing strategies affected presidential relationships both with the media and the people of the United States?

### **Presidential Communication Through Social Media In The Obama Era: Sowing The Seeds**

#### *As Presidential Candidate: Establishing A Reputation*

While social media started to gain prominence during the latter half of the George W. Bush administration, it was under Barack Obama that social media and the evolution of technology as a whole began to factor much more prominently into the press-presidency relationship, even in spite of some significant changes in his reputation after his ascent to the

presidency. Obama's candidacy and presidency, in essence, represented an integration into the political landscape of social media, its often-participatory nature, and its potential to engage citizens.

Obama began to obtain a reputation as a "master of social media and digital text" during his 2008 presidential campaign, with potential voters and participants in the political process being able to friend him on Facebook and follow him on Twitter (Losh, 2012, p. 255). Such varied uses of social media were "an integral part of [Obama's] campaign strategy," encouraging people to become an active part of the political process (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 1). Through his use of the Internet and the quickly-developing medium of social media, Obama successfully capitalized on the "ethos of participatory culture, smart mobs, user-friendly technology, and online community while promulgating ideologies of technocratic progress and direct democracy in the process," particularly in comparison to his Republican competitor John McCain (Losh, 2012, p. 256).

McCain's strategy was ineffective because the campaign's attempts to reach out to a technologically inclined audience were not so participatory as they were passive, leading to 'flops' such as 'McCain Space,' an "empty social networking site," or 'Pork Invaders,' a Facebook application with "predictable game play" (Losh, 2012, p. 256). Obama's strategy resonated with audiences, meanwhile, because of the way the campaign "used social media and technology as an integral part of their campaign strategy" in both the primary and general elections, aiming not only to raise money for the cause, but also "to develop a groundswell of empowered volunteers who felt that they could make a difference" (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 1). In essence, where McCain's campaign aimed for something of a traditional communication approach through social media (i.e. not dissimilar to the SMCR model), Obama's campaign took

full advantage of the three-dimensional nature of communication that social media brings about, allowing participants not only to connect with the campaign itself, but also with one another.

Overall, in terms of sheer metrics, Obama's campaign ultimately outnumbered McCain's campaign by significant amounts on a number of prominent social media websites, indicating to some extent the success the Obama campaign approach was met with. For example, where McCain's campaign Facebook page accumulated over 600,000 supporters throughout the election cycle, Obama's campaign page on the same site built up a following of almost 2.5 million supporters, around quadruple the following of McCain's page (Chang & Aaker, 2009). The advantage proved even more lopsided with regard to Twitter; McCain's campaign account on the service ended the election with under 5,000 followers, while Obama's page, with more updates on the campaign than McCain's, finished the campaign with well over 100,000 followers (Chang & Aaker, 2009). While campaigns such as McCain's had access to many of the same tools as Obama's campaign, ultimately, effective use of those technologies to "organize, communicate, and fundraise," along with successful integration of those tools into a "bottoms-up grassroots campaign strategy that tapped into the hearts of the voters," ultimately led the Obama campaign to success (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 2).

Imagery of Obama on the campaign trail, then, aimed to further build and cement the technologically-savvy reputation he established. Losh (2012) notes one particular example of a famous photo in the months before his inauguration where "the president-elect points directly at the camera as he sits next to a PacMan-stickered Mac laptop surrounded by a number of hand-held devices and peripherals" (p. 257). The image portrays Obama as "a multi-tasker, as comfortable in his role as consumer of new media as in his role as subject and producer of it" – in essence, an incoming president for the digital age (Losh, 2012, p. 257).

While Obama was the central figure in the overall campaign, it is worth noting the numerous other people who helped create Obama's social media campaign and made it into the success it ultimately became. Over the course of the campaign, Obama's new media team eventually swelled in size to about 100 people by a month after the general election, helping to coordinate voter registration and virtual canvassing efforts while the campaign's social media effort continued (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 16).

Ultimately, Obama's campaign created something of a framework for future politicians and candidates to base their respective online and social media strategies on. For example, Rahaf Harfoush, a new media strategist who volunteered for Obama's campaign, noted several lessons learned from the Obama campaign's approach to new media such as social media (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 20). In particular, Harfoush emphasized the need to "know the lay of the land" in social media; that is, the need to understand not only what social networks are most active, but also how people go about communicating with one another and how that varies between different social media services (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 20). This, in turn, connects to the need to have a clear call to action and build relationships with people on these various social media services. In the case of Obama's campaign, social media use was meant to foster activity offline (whether in terms of donations or encouraging people to vote, among many other activities the campaign emphasized) (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 20). From Harfoush's point of view, however, success also lies in "[empowering] brand ambassadors [and embracing] co-creation;" that is, the audience must be able to have some say in providing feedback and affecting change in the campaign, and the campaign must allow the brand and the message to evolve based on that feedback (Chang & Aaker, 2009, p. 20). In essence, a successful social media campaign must move away from traditional methods of communication such as the SMCR model and embrace



the power of social media to facilitate forms of communication that allow for active participation in the political process.

Though Obama would continue to use social media to get messages out to his base and the American public as a whole after his successful campaign, his initial reputation would not last.

*As President: Taking A Detached, Traditional Approach*

Losh (2012) notes that Obama's reputation took something of an ironic twist after he officially became president, particularly considering the image he established for himself during his 2008 presidential campaign. The White House's main social media message, particularly where Obama was concerned, was that "the president [was] often an awkward or detached producer of computer-mediated messages and no longer a fluent receiver of them" (Losh, 2012, p. 257). This could be seen most clearly in pictures of Obama during his presidency. In essence, the administration engaged in an active effort to change the portrayal of the president in a technological and media context. In contrast to the aforementioned pre-inauguration picture, Obama was pictured much less often with his BlackBerry (and when he *was* pictured with it, it was far removed from the "official spaces of statecraft"), and particularly in a presidential business context, many pictures of Obama included his using a wired phone, as if such technology is "clearly deemed much more presidential" (Losh, 2012, p. 258). In numerous cases, "the telephone's association with the sober images of statecraft and crisis management is presented without any potential ironies" (Losh, 2012, p. 258). In this sense, imagery of Obama during his presidency aimed to channel the ways in which past presidents were perceived, rather than continuing the unique reputation he had previously established for himself.

This is not to say that Obama's presidency eschewed contemporary technology entirely, particularly in aiming to communicate with the people. For example, in terms of the idea of "preaching to the choir," previous presidents who wished to announce a new policy or send a particular message to a friendly audience would have held a town hall meeting or held an exclusive event with some form of specialty publication. While Obama's administration continued to do this, they also "took it a step further" and created a video reporting operation (the first ever such operation in-house) to produce a weekly program for viewing on the White House website (Milligan, 2015). Such an operation "[enabled] the administration to bypass the press corps completely, if it [chose]," thus allowing the president a sort of freedom in communication that had not previously been possible (Milligan, 2015). In this sense, the gatekeeper capacity of the media, though not completely eradicated, was diminished significantly; presidents, because of this, gain much more power in terms of communicating their message in the way they wish it to be received by the public.

Even in using contemporary technology, however, the way in which Obama went about using it channeled the ways in which past presidents would use more traditional forms of media such as television and radio. The aforementioned YouTube weekly address, for example, was set up in such a way that text comments on the videos were allowed, but video responses were not, thus eliminating "the inconvenient possibility that citizens might be viewed as well as view" (Losh, 2012, p. 260). In this way, the public, while given the chance to view the president, did not get so much of a chance to respond or interact with the president and his messages. In this sense, these addresses became "a mode of one-to-many broadcasting in an era of many-to-many communication" within the greater context of Obama's overall digital rhetoric on social media, (Losh, 2012, p. 260). Even so, the delivery method of these addresses still differed from

traditional forms of media in the sense that legacy media outlets did not have the gatekeeping power they would have if these addresses were, for example, broadcast on radio, as was done with Ronald Reagan's weekly addresses to the nation during his presidency.

*Obama and Presidential Approaches to Facebook and Twitter*

In spite of Twitter being a fairly new form of media during his presidency, thus offering Obama new opportunities in terms of how to interact with his audience (be it the American public, a particular subsection of it, or the world as a whole), Obama's approach to Twitter, much like his aforementioned approach to YouTube, fit significantly within the traditional framework of media. During his presidency, the tweets Obama sent out "were rare and carefully crafted, obviously having gone through a serious vetting process by his staff for format and content" (Frantzich, 2019, p. 171). In this case, rather than removing the role of the gatekeeper entirely, Obama's use of social media shifted the gatekeeper role away from the legacy media to people within his administration. While this centralized his power to control his messages to some extent, he still did not have complete autonomy as a source in determining how others might see and perceive his messages, though he could have taken on that role had he chosen to.

The administration's goal in the early part of Obama's presidency was to foster communication and engagement on the internet through avenues such as Obama's posts on Twitter (Frantzich, 2019). This was something of a means to an end, and the hope on the administration's part was that the president's improved image as a result of social media posts and the like, along with increased levels of informing and engaging with citizens, would increase his political power, and that, by extension, "involved citizens would put pressure on members of Congress to follow the president's direction" (Frantzich, 2019, p. 169). In essence, social media, in this stage of Obama's presidency, served as a tool to facilitate policy making. This reliance,

however, did not last, and as the presidency continued, the administration ended up lessening their usage of social media to govern (Frantzich, 2019).

All the same, this and numerous other approaches to social media and similar new media avenues helped to establish Obama's credibility, which would ultimately work in his favor during the 2012 election campaign. Where his opponent Mitt Romney had to establish and, at times, *borrow* credibility in order to prove his viability for the presidency, Obama's campaign had to post much less in the way of images on Facebook compared to Romney's campaign, particularly because "the public clearly had a better picture of who Obama is as they had had four years to get to know him," and also because Obama's holding the presidential office gave him "assumed credibility" (Goodnow, 2013, p. 1593-1594). In essence, Obama did not have to rely so much on social media during the later portion of his presidency because the very nature of the office helped to establish his credibility and favorability with the American and international public.

This could also be seen to some extent in the Obama campaign's approach to social media during the 2012 presidential election. On Facebook, Obama's campaign aimed to personalize messages intensively "in a rhetorical attempt to close the gap between the candidate and his supporters," but the messages were crafted in such a way as to discourage feedback loops and, by extension, dialogue between Obama and his supporters (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2014, p. 16). In this sense, the campaign's approach eschewed to some extent the lessons learned from Obama's 2008 campaign (instead taking a more traditional approach to reaching their audience, not unlike McCain's 2008 campaign), though there continued to be a key emphasis in the campaign's use of Facebook to extend and mobilize the campaign's fan base (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2014, p. 16). In essence, while the campaign's use of Facebook was a significant

change (and, to some extent, a continuation of the 2008 approach) in how social media could be used in spreading Obama's messages, it did not so much represent change in terms of creating "truly interactive communication between politicians and citizens" (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2014, p. 16). It did, however, represent change insofar as social media allowing Obama and his campaign to directly communicate with the public, thus bypassing other political actors (such as traditional media and, by extension, the press) and the "noise" they can produce (Gerodimos & Justinussen, 2014, p. 16).

### **Social Media And The Donald Trump Presidency: Tweeting In The Political Arena**

To some extent, Donald Trump's usage of social media during both his candidacy and his presidency has paralleled that of Obama's. While Obama and Trump both used social media as a tool to make their policy priorities clear and reach out to and energize their respective bases, Trump took these a step further by removing the gatekeeper role entirely, as well as attacking and even attempting to delegitimize those figures he sees as his enemies (such as the news media and legislators from the Democrats, the opposing political party). Where Obama's approach to social media changed significantly as his presidency progressed, Trump's usage of it has remained much the same, even in spite of his own claims prior to his inauguration that he would become less reliant on it during his presidency.

#### *Trump And The 2016 Campaign: Social Media As A Megaphone*

Much as the Obama campaign in 2008 got attention in part because of the way it took full advantage of social media, so too did Trump's 2016 presidential campaign garner attention. Unlike the Obama campaign, this was not so much a result of an overall campaign staff effort as it was a result of Trump's direct, often-personal usage of it, particularly on Twitter. His tweets, rather than being "carefully crafted" (as previously mentioned) as Obama's presidential tweets

were, carried (and still now carry) an “‘off the top of the head’ character” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 171). Trump, in essence, used his tweets during the campaign to effectively “bypass the legacy media,” with unbridled tweets such as his “[showing] him to be a man of firm commitments willing to make strong assertions” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 171). In essence, Trump was not afraid to be direct and speak his mind on Twitter, representing a significant departure from the Obama presidency approach.

His tweets also allowed him to garner significant attention from both traditional media and social media, especially on days when he did not have a campaign event planned (Kellner, 2018). Combined with the significant amount of attention given to Trump on cable news media in particular on days when he *did* have a campaign event, the net effect of Trump’s tweets was that Trump, no matter the day’s other events, would more often than not dominate news coverage.

Trump tweeted about a variety of topics during his campaign, ranging from attacks on fellow Republican candidates for president (such as Marco Rubio) to attacks on Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton to promotions of his own appearances in the news media (Luo, Niemi, Li, & Hu, 2016). Among those particular topics, the most popular among Trump followers (i.e. the tweets that gained the most likes) in the last months of 2015 came in the form of tweets about Democrats such as Clinton (Luo et al., 2016).

At the time, Trump claimed that his tweeting would stop after he became president because it was “not presidential,” and only a limited number of people at the time of the 2016 campaign expected that Twitter would go on to become a key part of Trump’s presidential media strategy (Frantzich, 2019, p. 171). In Trump’s case, the expectations of his presidency proved to

be very different from reality; ultimately, “Trump’s Twitter candidacy [was] totally eclipsed by his Twitter presidency” (Perez-Curiel & Limon Naharro, 2019, p. 60).

*As President: “Tweeter In Office”*

As previously noted, Obama’s tweets were few and far between; Trump, meanwhile, continued to tweet frequently after his presidency began, and in his first six months in office, he tweeted out messages from his personal account (@realDonaldTrump) an average of eleven times a day (Frantzich, 2019, p. 171). In this sense, Trump’s “non-stop barrage of tweets” became a way for him to manage both his presidency and the U.S. government, an additional dramatic change from Obama’s strategy (Perez-Curiel & Limon Naharro, 2019, p. 58).

Further, many of those tweets took on a negative character, particularly toward those who found fault in the president’s actions; during his first seven months in office, Trump attacked many more lawmakers from the Democratic Party than his own Republican Party, and he also “[employed] tactics to delegitimize the press” through Twitter (Anderson, 2017, p. 36). Indeed, tweets along those lines found significant success; in those first months, 20 of his 100 most-engaged-with tweets revolved around personal attacks, with a further 13 out of the top 100 focusing on criticism of the media (Anderson, 2017, p. 40).

Attacks aside, Trump’s tweets touch upon a variety of topics, ranging from announcing, elaborating on and defending policy to announcing official decisions and interacting with various foreign leaders; all this comes in addition to the promotion of the president’s agenda (Laguarda, 2019).

To some extent, Trump’s tweets are directed at two separate audiences: the American public (in particular, Trump’s base of supporters) and the decision-makers and other workers within government who can be, in one way or another, directly impacted by the president’s

rhetoric and actions, especially when he announces policy initiatives through social media. Thus, Trump's Twitter page carries with it significant power in terms of framing, in the sense that the president's tweets can not only impact how the American public (and, by extension, his base) perceives particular issues (not only in terms of how important they are), but also potentially put lower levels of government into a position such that they feel obligated to take action on a particular policy or public administration matter (Laguarda, 2019).

Trump's impact in the realm of Twitter in particular has been significant; Perez-Curiel & Limon Naharro (2019) argue Trump has used the medium to further his administration's proposals and distribute his manifesto, essentially bringing the ideas of propaganda to his social media work:

[H]e is an influencer who acts above and beyond party politics, applies corporate communication and marketing techniques, and has found in social networks an expeditious format and effective discourse that catches the attention of active communities, notwithstanding his all but complete lack of interaction with his followers. (p. 60)

In this sense, social media, in part because of the declining role of traditional media outlets, has become a tool not only for people to obtain information, but also for high-profile users such as Trump to shape public opinion (Perez-Curiel & Limon Naharro, 2019).

#### *News Media and Trump: Taking The Offensive*

Though many people and groups, both political and non-political, have been the targets of Twitter attacks from Trump both prior to and during his presidency, the news media in particular drew, and continues to draw, Trump's ire. In some tweets, Trump has presented the mainstream media as the "enemy of the American people," and he has often referred to the



content presented by said media as “fake news” (Kellner, 2018, p. 34). In this sense, insofar as the news media can “expose the lies, deceits, and corruption of those in power,” Trump’s attacks on the mainstream media also serve as an attack on truth itself (Kellner, 2018, p. 34).

Even as Trump’s Twitter usage represents a new era of presidential communication, and even as Trump attacks mainstream media on an almost-daily basis, the media is still attentive to the president’s message in much the same way as it was with previous administrations, insofar as it “[hangs] on every word of a president, expecting careful parsing to reveal true goals and strategies” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 172). This is particularly notable given how Trump’s tweets often show him being defiant or lashing out toward those who are attacking him (Frantzich, 2019). Such words, particularly when they are “emotionally charged, conflicting, or confusing,” can lead to “a firestorm of interpretation” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 172).

Thus, even as Trump frequently attacks the news media, those same mainstream news sources remain keen to cover his tweets, especially in a 24-hour news environment where reporters are expected to be as timely as possible; in this way, Trump’s tweets can create a bevy of news coverage. In essence, the tweets Trump makes “are like rocks thrown in a pool, with the reaction culminating in ripples of media attention” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 174).

#### *Downsides Of Trump’s Twitter Usage*

While Trump’s approach to social media, particularly in terms of his frequent tweets, has met with a significant amount of success, this is not to say that his direct, personal, and occasionally demeaning approach to using Twitter has been without its detractors. Indeed, multiple leaders within the Republican Party (such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell) noted some aggravation with how much Trump uses Twitter to communicate with the public and the media (Frantzich, 2019). Indeed, his tweets have met with criticism on the whole, as some

see them as “diminishing the president’s focus and distracting all the players from key issues” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 163).

While the lack of vetting of his tweets does lead in some senses to a layer of authenticity, so, too, does it create other problems. This can call Trump’s credibility into question, as well as inhibit the public and news media’s ability to take his messages seriously. One particularly infamous example came in May 2017, a few months into his presidency, when Trump posted a late-night tweet reading “Despite the constant negative press covfefe.” The tweet very quickly led to speculation about what was meant by the tweet, particularly because of the apparent misspelling within it (Murphy Jr., 2017). Trump would delete the tweet a few hours later, but ultimately, the controversy “led to concern about how seriously his tweets should be taken” (Frantzich, 2019, p. 173). The aforementioned tweet is one of a numerous number of examples of tweets with misstatements of policy positions and the like, along with grammatical and spelling errors and even gibberish; in this sense, such tweets “have the potential for giving his opposition (and the media) fodder for negative reaction and may well undermine his veracity,” leading to coverage about Trump’s apparent mistakes which overshadows the content he intended to tweet (Frantzich, 2019, p. 173). Further, Trump’s tweets can lead to sheer confusion, in the sense that “unlike press conferences, the media cannot get clarification of the president’s thinking through a tweet;” thus, while assertive tweets can certainly garner news media attention, so, too, can they leave people wondering where Trump even stands on an issue (Frantzich, 2019, p. 173). In this sense, such tweets can sow uncertainty in the news media and, in turn, the American public.

Trump’s Twitter usage has, at times, even led to lawsuits revolving around the First Amendment of the Constitution and the way in which he uses the service. In 2019, for example,

the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York ruled unanimously that Trump “[had] been violating the Constitution by blocking people from following his Twitter account because they criticized or mocked him” (Savage, 2019). The lawsuit came after a number of Twitter users unsuccessfully petitioned the White House to unblock their accounts (Savage, 2019). The gist of the ruling revolved around Trump using Twitter to conduct government business – in essence, under the First Amendment, Trump “cannot exclude some Americans from reading his posts – and engaging in conversations in the replies to them – because he does not like their views” (Savage, 2019). Given the president’s influence in the realm of American and even international politics, the ruling was perhaps the most prominent out of a litany of cases focusing on the role of the First Amendment in an increasingly digital environment for politics and, by extension, political expression (Savage, 2019). The unique nature of Trump governing by way of Twitter means that even now, the American public, the news media, and the various branches and levels of government are having to adjust to a new frontier, in addition to all the questions about validity and legitimacy that can come with it.

### **Conclusion: The Road Ahead**

Thanks to social media, the last 15 years have been marked by significant change in the way that presidents communicate with the people of the country, the media, and the world as a whole. In essence, this present era of presidential communication marks a drastic shift from the heyday of television, radio, and other traditional media. Where Obama used social media to connect with a wide range of the American electorate (especially leading up to the 2008 and 2012 elections) while also making a point to reach out to his base with regard to key policies and areas of action, Trump has used Twitter in particular to connect with his base and attack those individuals and those groups who he perceives as taking issues with his policies or his actions.

Further, where Obama took a professional approach to social media that still retained links to the gatekeeping traditional media has engaged in with the president, Trump has severed those ties and been much more willing to speak his mind directly, to the chagrin of numerous political actors with various points of view. In these various senses, the president has not only restored the power he had to affect public opinion and governmental discourse he held when traditional media was at its peak, he has arguably increased *beyond* that level of power (especially given the lack of gatekeeping under Trump's administration in particular).

These new frontiers of social media reached by Obama and Trump come with an assortment of questions about what the future holds. In an era where the president frequently attacks the media who reports on his every word and action, how can the media and those people involved with it fight back against the president's media criticism while also continuing to perform their usual duties? How might the media have to evolve to suit the new reality? Further, what models of communication might have to arise to accurately reflect these changes? How relevant are such models as the SMCR model in an era with much more potential for noise and distortion of messages (even when media's influence is drastically dwindling)?

Meanwhile, with the gatekeeping function of the media bypassed, the responsibility of fact-checking and discerning of truth from falsehoods and deception that the media once held (and still holds to some extent) now falls to the public. This is a challenging proposition given not only the power of such social media users as Trump to directly impact public opinion, but also the ability of social media users to self-select into circles where the president's tweets and other social media actions may go completely unvetted and unchallenged.

In essence, the increasing prevalence of social media has caused a significant shift in the political balance of power, wherein the president has absorbed a significant amount of the

media's power, leaving the public and what remains of traditional media to combat the problems (political, social, and otherwise) that may arise as a result. Indeed, the power of the president, in many case, could well be left unchecked (except within the government itself). This, in turn, has drastic consequences for the ability of democracy and government as it currently exists in the United States to survive, raising the question if it can survive amid an overflowing sea of disinformation being disseminated from what was already the nation's most powerful political office, especially when this disinformation is combined with blind trust from significant swathes of the public.

It cannot be definitively said what further changes to the presidential social media approach might take place in the years to come, and what changes to the political balance of power might arise as a result of that approach; even so, there is much still to be learned from the ways in which the country's various political actors are adapting to its present realities. Where the public *is* concerned with fighting social media disinformation, how are they going about it? Where traditional media still has a role to play, how are they going about that role when messages from the president are ever-changing and ever uncertain? What up-and-coming technology could further affect the presidential relationship with the media and public in the years to come, and what can be done to start adapting to those new realities sooner rather than later? Given the president's power, these questions could have profound implications for the country's future.

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